

ABSTRACT

A healthcare network that is used by doctors, patients, nurses, home healthcare agencies, hospitals, etc. employs digital signatures for providing secure access to documents and other information. It also employs watermarked electronic image signatures to authenticate the documents and other information. When a user, such as a doctor, signs a document, such as a patient's documents, a watermarked electronic image signature of the user is selectively employed, along with the user's digital signatures that are based on public and private keys, to authenticate the user and determine the identity of the signer. Such a mechanism makes it possible to employ the watermarked electronic image signature as proof of the user having signed the document. In addition, when the document is printed or viewed on the screen, the inclusion of the electronic image signature on the display or the insertion of the watermarked electronic image signature in the printed output helps confirm the fact that the document has been previously signed, while also providing information about the signer's identity.